

Message Text

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14

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OC-06 CCO-00 OPR-02 A-01 SCA-01 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EUR-12 SAM-01 SSM-03 SAB-01

IO-13 AF-08 EB-07 /112 W

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAIR, PINS, PINT, PFOR, LE

SUBJECT: BEIRUT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT PROGNOSIS

REF: BEIRUT 5932

1. MEA/BEIRUT SAYS IT HAS NO IDEA WHEN IT WILL BE POSSIBLE REOPEN BEIRUT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT CLOSED JUNE 27 WHEN MEA BOEING 707 HIT ON GROUND DURING RIGHTIST BOMBARDMENT. AIRCRAFT TOTALLY DESTROYED, KILLING PILOT AND SEVERELY BURNING TWO CREW MEMBERS. MEA POSITION REAFFIRMS PESSIMISM OF MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS ADEL OSSEIRAN WHO SAID JULY 6 HE DOUBTED AIRPORT WOULD REOPEN SOON. SEE REFTEL.

2. ALTHOUGH MEA SAYS IT WILL RECOMMENCE SERVICE IMMEDIATELY UPON RECEIPT OF "GUARANTEES," ACTIVITY OF MEA/BEIRUT INDICATES AIRLINE COMPANY HAS LITTLE HOPE OF GETTING SUCH GUARANTEES SOON. GUARANTEES INCLUDE CHRISTIAN DEMANDS THAT LEBANESE FROM EASTERN SECTOR BE PROVIDED SAFE PASSAGE TO AND FROM AIRPORT, THAT AIRPORT NOT BE USED FOR ARMS ENTRY AND THAT JOINT RIGHT/LEFT COMMITTEE SUPERVISE AIRPORT OPERATION. OSSEIRAN, WHO IN REFTEL DESCRIBED THE JUNE 27 SHELLING OF AIRPORT AS BASELESS, NOW SAYS DEMANDS OF RIGHTIST GROUPS ARE "ILLOGICAL."

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3. AIRPORT HAD REOPENED TO LIMITED SERVICE JUNE 23 AFTER BEING CLOSED SINCE JUNE 7 WHEN AREA BECAME ACTIVE BATTLE GROUND OF SYRIAN BACKED SAIQA FORCES VERSUS FATAH AND LEFTISTS. BUT MEA MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEES, MANY OF WHOM LIVED FOR MONTHS AT AIRPORT, UNABLE TO REACH THEIR HOMES AND FREQUENTLY UNDER FIRE, APPEAR WITH DEATH AND WOUNDING OF COLLEAGUES TO HAVE REACHED LIMIT OF ENDURANCE. MEA HAS TEMPORARILY TRANSFERRED HEAD OFFICE TO PARIS.

4. TRANS-MEDITERRANEAN AIRWAYS, ONLY CARGO SERVICE OPERATING OUT OF BEIRUT IN RECENT MONTHS, ALSO REPORTED MOVING HEADQUARTERS FROM BEIRUT TO LONDON AT LEAST TEMPORARILY.

5. MEA EVACUATING PERSONNEL VIA ROAD TO DAMASCUS AND MOST HAVE REPORTEDLY ALREADY LEFT COUNTRY. TWO BURNED CREW MEMBERS, ONE AMCIT AND ONE LEBANESE, EVACUATED BY ROAD TO DAMASCUS ON JULY 4 AND FLOWN TO BURN CENTER IN BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND. CONVOY OF TWO BURN VICTIMS ALSO EVACUATED FIVE OTHER MEA EMPLOYEES.

6. RELIABLE MEA SOURCE REPORTED JULY 6 THAT AIRPORT RUNWAYS STILL USABLE, CONTAINING ONLY EIGHT SMALL RUPTURES DUE BOMBARDMENTS. CONDITION OF RADAR AND CONTROL TOWER EQUIPMENT SUBJECT OF CONFLICTING REPORTS, BUT SAME SOURCE REPORTED JUNE 24 THAT EQUIPMENT STILL INTACT. HOWEVER, IT HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATED SEVERAL TIMES THAT AIRCRAFT CAN LAND AT AIRPORT IN DAYLIGHT HOURS WITHOUT REFERENCE TO CONTROL TOWER. LATEST DEMONSTRATION WAS JULY 8 LANDING OF ICRC DC-6 CARRYING SIX TONS MEDICAL SUPPLIES.

7. AIRPORT PRESENTLY UNDER CONTROL ARAB LEAGUE FORCE COMPOSED OF SOME 700 SYRIANS, 300 LIBYANS, 500 SAUDI ARABIANS, AND 500 SUDANESE. PERIODIC BOMBARDMENTS CONTINUE. PURPOSE OF ARAB LEAGUE FORCE IS TO SUPERVISE CEASE-FIRE WHICH SO FAR HAS BEEN IMPOSSIBLE TO IMPOSE. AIRPORT WAS PRIMARY RALLY POINT OF SYRIANS AND LIBYAN ARAB LEAGUE FORCES WHO ACCEPTED CONTROL OF AREA FROM REGULAR SYRIAN ARMY ON JUNE 21. HOWEVER, CONTINUED QUARRELS HAVE KEPT ALL FORCES FROM ADVANCING FROM AIRPORT AREA AND JUNE 23 SHELLING SEEN LARGELY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN RESPONSE TO HEIGHTENED CHRISTIAN FEARS THAT AIRPORT BE USED AS ENTRY POINT FOR ARMS FOR PALESTINIANS AND LEFTISTS. CHRISTIANS ALSO MISTRUST LIBYAN INTENTIONS, HAVING REJECTED LIBYANS AS LEGITIMATE PARTICIPANTS IN ARAB LEAGUE FORCE.

8. CHRISTIAN ARTILLERY CONTINUES DOMINATE AIRPORT FROM SEVERAL POINTS AND, UNLESS GUARANTEES CAN BE WORKED OUT, IT IS UNLIKELY CHRISTIANS WILL ALLOW AIRPORT REOPEN, ALTHOUGH SOME

ICRC AND OTHER MERCY FLIGHTS MAY BE ALLOWED IN. FOR NOW
CHRISTIANS QUITE CONTENT WITH JOUNIEH PORT AS SUPPLY ENTRY AND
PERSONNEL EXIT PORT. SOME 12 BOATS NOW PROVIDING DAILY
SERVICE BETWEEN LEBANON AND CYPRUS.
SEELYE

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